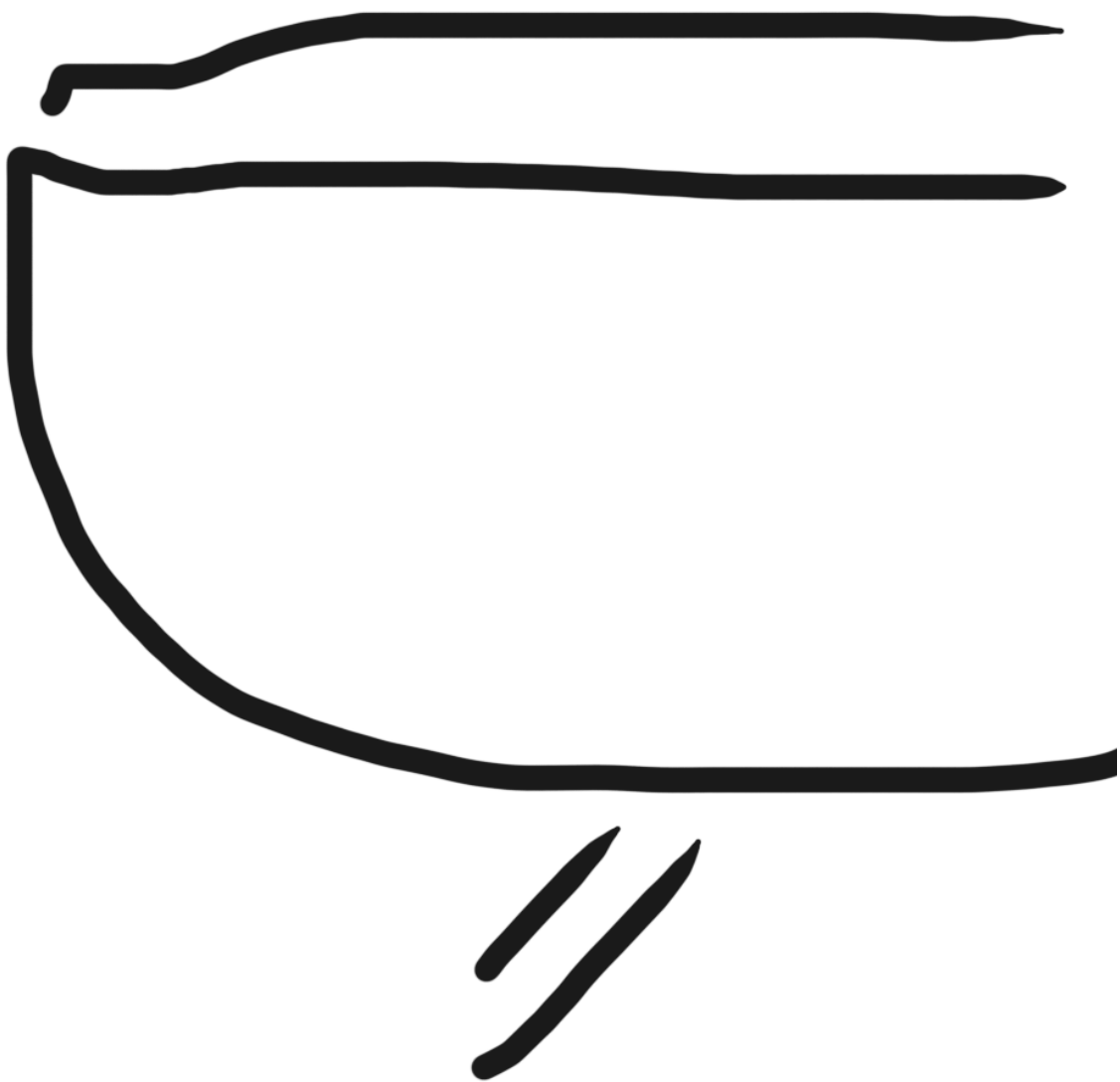


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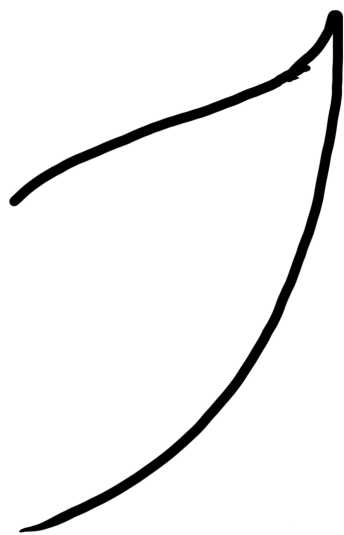


My Day

I saw a leaf
perched on a tree
above my window
flapping free
I knew I must have it.

All day I tried climbing
fruitlessly, slipping,
losing my footing
I thought how far was the fall.

By night I was hardly closer.
Returning to my window,
“I’m afraid of tumbling down.”



Laodice

Hecuba (mother)

“Dee-See, why are you calling so late?”

“I’m sorry mother. I forgot the time difference.”

“It’s quite ok, my darling. I’m always happy to have you call. You look skinny, are you eating enough? I hope you’re eating enough. And stop eating out so often, I worry about you. What about the other girls how are they? Getting along? Are you seeing anyone? Oh it’s fine, I know everything by the look on your face. Of course, I never imagined you’d leave Ilium to live somewhere so far away, I thought ‘ain’t the schools here good enough for my little girl?’ but I see now you need to spread your wings. So fly my little daughter, fly to Argos, see how the Argives live. Are they different? I’ve met a few, of course, but to really be close to them is something else. And the dialect? You can understand them? Your classes aren’t too difficult? Oh, Dee-See, I miss you darling.”

Nights in this townhouse crush me. I feel a gust of wind

breathing down the lonely street, nipping at my heels as I bring in the groceries. I stare back down the drive; he'll never be here again. Now when I return home, Laodice, you won't be here either. Imagine, after years of being Ilium's premier couple, if your father could see what I have left: a french window, a bottle of wine, and you. No longer you; you've gone off to the very country that tore your perfect father, your family, your people down. I close the gray curtains to block the view of that damned world outside, the wine glass chimes against the bottle as I snuggle into the leather armchair, I extend myself out onto the footrest, I awkwardly put the bottle on the faux-hardwood laminate at the very edge of the rug, and pull the blanket over myself. This is me now.

Remember that New Years party you threw in high school? Junior year, not the senior year one. I never minded y'all coming here to drink; I've never agreed with all those laws- you were all young and dumb and just needed guidance, an experienced hand, to make sure the nights stayed under control. This little townhouse. Imagine if the party could have been held on the old plantation. A proper ball. Why we could have ditched prom all together, held our own stately affair- a real cotillion. If only we could have used the old porch. I don't think you even remember the old porch. There I go- off track again, I was supposed to be thinking about that New Years party.

That New Years party. At first it was a small crowd, maybe twenty of you, filling in our humble home. You asked me nervously whether this boy, Aeneas, a senior who had taken a younger classmate to some seedier party downtown, should

be invited over. He'd run into a bit of a snag with his younger date. She'd gotten too drunk. Her parents called. Realized immediately their girl was tipsy. Demanded she be brought home. Not everyone's as hip as me, of course- some parents just want to control their children completely. Anyways, this poor boy wanted to come over and I giggled, of course he could. You hinted at some trepidation from her sister Chryseis. At the time a senior taking a sophomore out was beyond your limited social mores, and your best friend's sister at that? Oh what a scandal.. You expected me to say no, but I was intrigued. Besides she might have been your best friend, but I always thought Chryseis was too uptight. Just like her mother.

When he arrived, with a lecture from her parents still hanging on his defeated shoulders, you two were cold as ice. But adventures lead to fame: Aeneas had a story to tell. Any initial pullback from you or Chryseis- those days you two were so close- I haven't seen her for years already; when did the two of you stop talking again?- left the rest of the party as he charmed them with his story. He told it well, repeatedly, to whomever asked. He didn't exaggerate details from telling to telling, it was clear he wasn't lying. With each different group he retold it to, his confidence grew. So far as anyone was concerned he'd been a standup guy about the whole thing. She'd gotten too drunk, a few of the other boys pushed her to keep drinking and drinking until she had very much passed her limit. He'd driven her home, during which she'd made many attempts to dissuade him, offering anything and everything for him to turn the car around. He'd shut her down, brought her to the family's door, and had to sit through a very uncomfortable

talk with her mother, Laothe, in the family's ornate living room. Oh Laothe- you've always been such a snooty bitch. But it's the way he told it; in his retelling of events he didn't seem to realize that most people would of just run away: either left her at the party to deal with it on her own, or left her on her parents' lawn and driven off. But he went step by step, pulled her away from the party, drove her across town, and talked to the parents. Blatant and honest the whole way. Best of all, the poor boy didn't know he was a tragic hero. To him, all this was simply natural. I hadn't had a hero in quite a long time, Laodice, can't you see that?

There was no fault in what he'd done, even that sister of hers sat silently, pouting, knowing that he'd done the right thing. A quarter hour before midnight, beer in hand while standing over a chicken bites platter, I caught his eye. He gulped, I winked. I told him where he could find the sauces, casually running my hand down his supple arm as I pointed. He reminded me of when I was a prize- that's my best explanation.

It was about the time for the ball to drop. We crowded around the TV to see the festival at the Parthenon. He'd taken a seat in my upholstered armchair, comfortable in the best seat of the house; in the seat I drink myself to sleep in every night. Everyone stared at the TV, ten seconds left. I refilled my wine glass from the kitchen counter, made my way toward the boy. Sat down on the arm of the chair. He looked at me, adorable in his surprise, I think he might have tried to make eye contact with you, too, somewhere over my shoulder. With three seconds left it didn't matter where he was looking, I closed in.

My first New Year's kiss in years.

“Oh, mom's just drunk again,” I could practically hear your huddle in the back of the kitchen. But more important was his smile. He played it off as a joke, it was the right social move, but in that smile of his, with the corners of his mouth pricked up while his eyes refused to meet yours, I could see he was considering my offer.

Watching you teenagers play at partying. “Four beer queers,” I think I heard one of the captains of the wrestling team say. Adorable. Within the hour of the new year beginning, that same wrestling boy passed out on the back porch in a plastic armchair, faintly holding his bright red dip cup. All of y'all were dropping like flies by 2am. A few were still up, Aeneas was hanging around due to adrenaline from either driving as he called it “slightly over the limit” or getting the piss scared out of him by Laothe. Wine, glass after glass, easier for me to count in bottles. The others drifted off one-by-one. Where would he sleep? The floor. You didn't tell him directly, Laodice, but you made it obvious. Most of them were already sleeping upon it. You retreated with Chryseis to your bedroom. I pretended to mine.

Peering down, sometime past 3:30, with my living room filled by booming young snores and the thick stench of beer on linoleum. There he was at the foot of the stairs, a few others slumbering around him on yoga mats and blankets. Back to the master bathroom: I turned on the bathwater, I took it all off, wrapped a towel around myself. The years leave their marks, but my curves remain impressive. Towel around me I went downstairs. I patted his shoulder. I beckoned with a finger. I

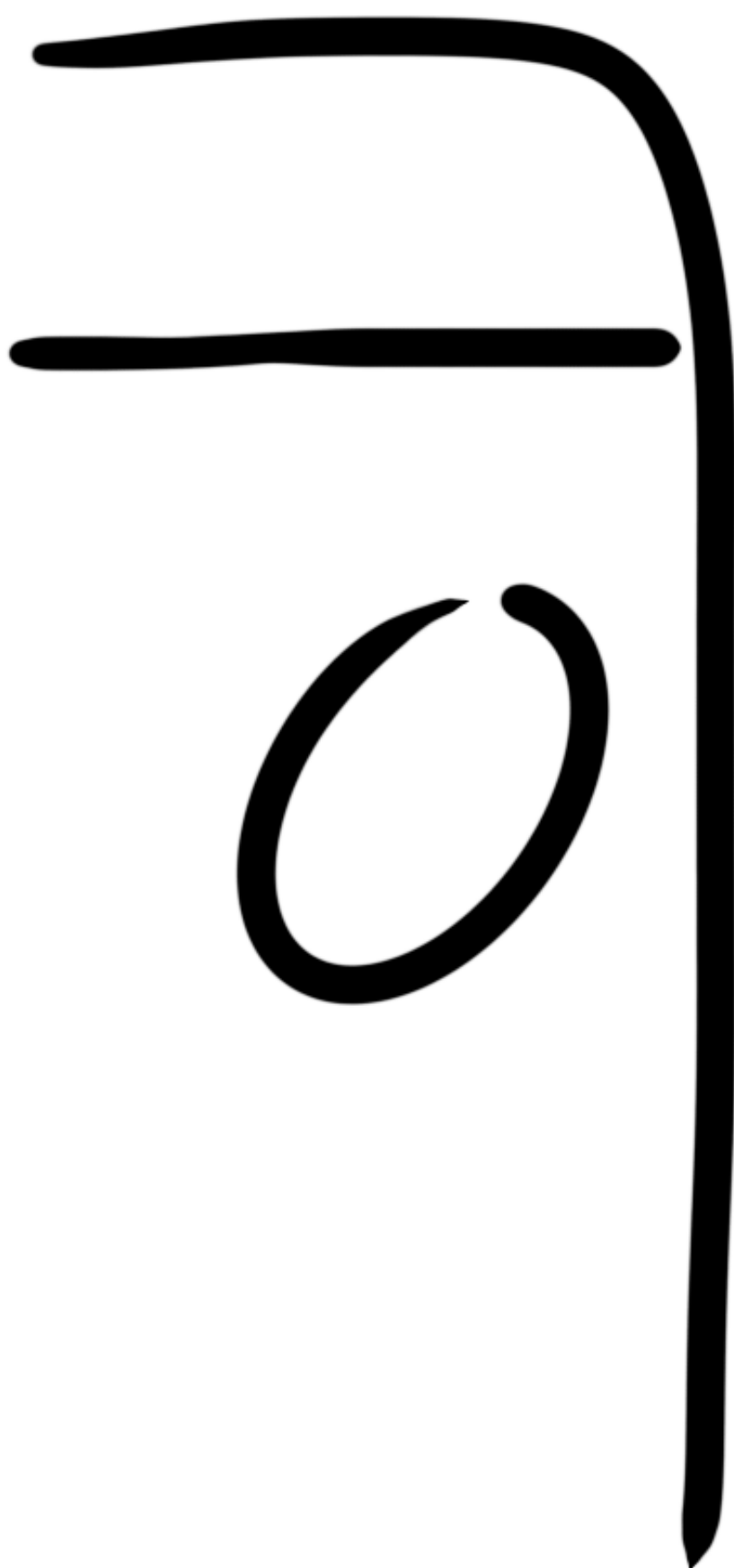
I walked slowly up the stairs. Aeneas followed.

Maybe one of your friends was still awake. Maybe Aeneas blabbed, although I doubt that. The rest of your time in highschool I felt their gazes a little differently upon me. The girls still hung around, there weren't many places they could openly drink, but they weren't as cheery when introducing their beaux. The boys came over as much as possible, leering, with their eyes ungracefully slipping down into my cleavage. Lapping it up; me and them.. Aeneas never came back. Whether that was his choice or yours, I'll never know. It isn't the sort of thing we'd talk about, you and I.

Now you're gone. My taste was just returning. Oh how I mourn the days your father and I would wine and dine envoys. Oh that plantation house, we'd play with the shotguns in the back acres, we'd mix love and sport and all in between. That was the life I was meant for. You've rejected it.

Never forget I was once like you. Beautiful, I mean. Do you know how much was given for me? A hecatomb of cattle. A full hecatomb. And now, all of you young women, so independent; always saying how things have changed, while you worry about nothing. I was the most beautiful girl in Phrygia, winning my hand was an achievement. It took years of wooing and cajoling. Oh, how many presents my father was given before he let me go. I have always known my own worth; I sit here now, slumping into sleep, knowing my own worth damn well. Now, you girls sell yourselves so cheaply- can't you see they'll discard you like a used toy? You like going to school? University? I had no choice, I was an inanimate jewel to be placed in a crown; you get to be alive. But they

don't sacrifice for you the way they did for me. Is this really what you wanted? To work for it? You've rejected me. It's fine, the gods have too. Go on Laodice, there's nothing in this townhouse for you.



Octagons I like

Dear turtle on a cliff,
The fastest way down
is to fall.

Yet you hold steady,
a green dome covered in octagons-
Evergreen fractals.
Stuck in a shipping route obstructing the world
as it waits to pass.

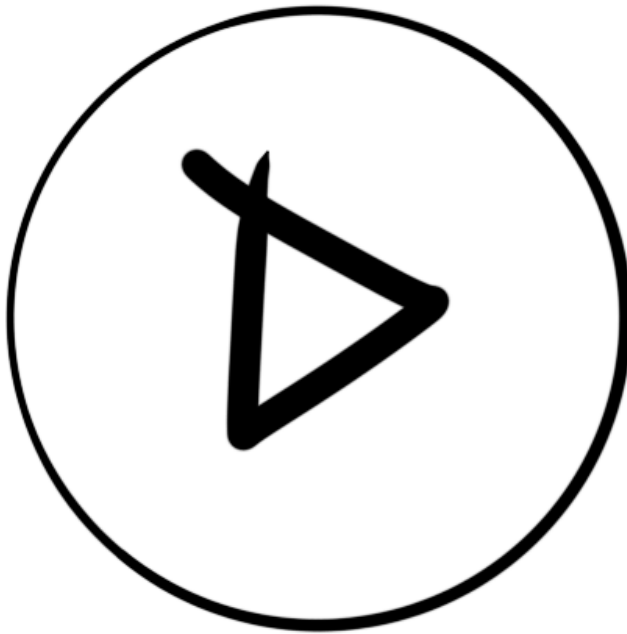
It's not the world, it's only you.
You
walking down the sidewalk
slightly ahead of me.

Neither left or right enough to squeeze
by. Undecided, perhaps.

Me neither wanting to walk out onto the street to pass
you, or
Or show my Phoenix-like ability to phase through the
wall.

I can.
That's how you make me feel-
I can pass through walls around you, but you walk too
slowly.

So I stare off the edge of the cliff and see a stop sign.
All I want to do is go.



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(unless otherwise noted)

